

2019

## Sara Baranczyk Honors Portfolio

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*Minnesota State University, Mankato*

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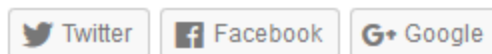
## Welcome!

### Mission Statement

My mission is to expand the knowledge of young minds while also sharing creativity, trust, and respect for all involved; to facilitate a practicing discipline, effort, and courage to try things beyond one's own comfort zone while also accepting failure as a possibility; to enjoy the work whilst making a difference in the lives of others. The goal is to dream it, achieve it, and learn from it.

Thank you for taking the time to review my work.

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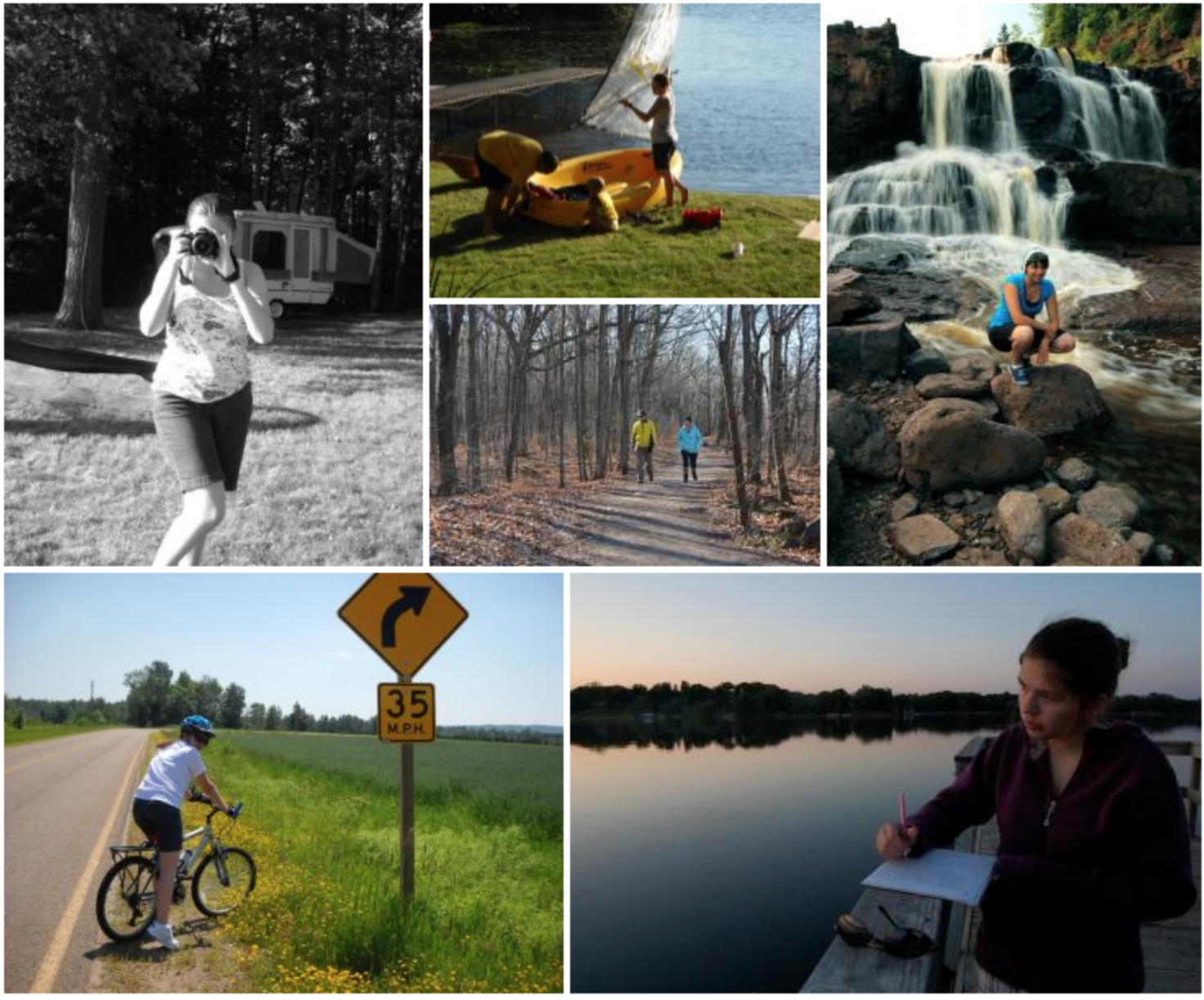
## About Me



I am an undergraduate student at Minnesota State University, Mankato (MNSU). I am pursuing degrees in Communication Arts & Literature Education and in Physics Education with the hope of becoming a licensed high school teacher in both content areas. I was raised in Saint Paul, Minnesota and attended an untraditional high school where I developed a passion for education and the process of learning. Because of this, I decided to pursue a career where I could inspire and foster learning in the generations to come. I joined the Honors Program at MNSU because I wanted to challenge myself in my academic studies as well as grow as a leader, researcher, global citizen, and as a person. The world is ever-changing and I believe the key to keeping up with the world is to maintain an open mind, which is something that the Honors Program nurtures within its students.



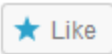
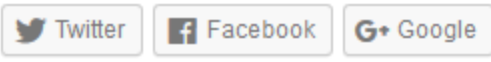
Apart from education, my passions include art, literature, mathematics, cooking, and spending time outdoors. Through these hobbies, I am able to expand my worldview and am provided the opportunity to meet new people who share my love for these activities.



In addition to these activities, I also enjoy volunteering and working. I think it is very important to give back to the community in which I live. Volunteering is one such way that I am able to do this.

Here are some of my [work experiences](#), [volunteer experiences](#), and other important [learning experiences](#).

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# Honors

The Honors Program at Minnesota State University, Mankato provides opportunities for its students to grow as leaders, researchers, and global citizens. The program measures competence and experience rather than credit numbers in order to gage a student’s success in the program and readiness for the world after college. These competencies are meant to be applicable to a variety of fields and therefore can be attained in many ways.

I originally wanted to join the Honors Program because I was interested in taking more challenging classes. I have always enjoyed learning, even the difficult aspects of it. The Honors Program offers a variety of classes every semester for students to take advantage of in order to further themselves in their education and careers. After joining the program, I found that the Honors Program sets up even more opportunities for its students to succeed than I had originally realized. Learning how to be an effective leader, an ethical researcher, and an open-minded global citizen makes students better prepared for the workforce once they graduate. Not only do the students learn about the subjects of leadership, research, and global citizenship, but they also receive valuable experience in these areas.

Leadership

Research

Global Citizenship

Language

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## Leadership

I used to think that being a leader meant being in charge and in control of any given situation, with a plan for everything and not hesitating to give orders or direction. However, in recent years, I have rejected that hypothesis and have found a more accurate definition: effective leadership is about organizing the strengths and weaknesses of a group to achieve a goal. It is not about being the best in the field or being the loudest. It is about getting the job done to everyone's satisfaction.

Through my various positions in my communities, I have been able to learn a lot about myself as a leader and about leadership in general. I put a lot of focus on analysis and deliberation, weighing options and conceptualizing obstacles and solutions. Adaptability, on the other hand, is often one of my biggest weaknesses. I like having an order to things, and I become easily frustrated with a change in plans. I try to look at every interaction and relationship as a leadership opportunity. From guiding tours around campus, to providing support on classroom technologies and instructional design, to editing a newsletter, to organizing club events, to teaching and serving as a role model as a camp counselor—all allowed me to grow as a leader.

I want to improve my leadership skills as a future educator, which is why working at **Camp Maverick** was a crucial leadership experience for me. I was able to observe my fellow counselors' leadership styles, learn from them, and develop my own. Some counselors took a more authoritarian approach to leading their campers, making every decision about what activities were to be done and when. This worked really well for the younger campers who needed more structure, but not as well for the older ones who wanted to be a part of the decision making. Because of this observation, I was able to adapt my leadership style to the needs of the various campers with whom I worked. While adaptability isn't my strong suit, I found a way to give the campers choices while also maintaining my desire to have a structured plan. Similarly, as the **President of Sigma Tau Delta**, I've had to reorganize events based on member interest or logistical shortcomings. I find it important to have a plan available to be changed, especially in roles where others look to me for support or as an example.

Leadership roles aren't always clearly defined, such as being the President of a club or a camp counselor, but they all depend on having a team to achieve their goals. As a **Student Ambassador**, I've learned that leadership and teamwork does not usually follow a hierarchical scheme with the leader on top and the followers on the bottom. A leader is led by the needs of their followers. I can't make arbitrary decisions about what parts of campus to show if I want the visitors in my groups to actually get something out of the tours I provide. I need to listen and follow the directions that they provide in order to lead them to their destinations of interest. Similarly, as a **D2L Brightspace Faculty Support Specialist**, I needed to listen to the needs of my customers and follow their plans for their courses. Leadership is a team effort and should not be the product of one person, but of many on the team.

Most leadership tends to be very goal-oriented, but it doesn't have to be. While my work as **editor of the Beacon** newsletter focused almost exclusively on the single goal of producing a newsletter every semester, I was also able to use my leadership position to help other honors students grow in the competency areas. This wasn't an intended goal of leading the *Beacon* team, but nonetheless, it was a product of my position. I was able to give articles to students that would allow them to branch out of their comfort zones and talk to people who have accomplished amazing things. I was also able to help them articulate and reflect on these experiences and share them with the campus community. I think it's important to recognize the kind of impact one's leadership has on their team, and I want to work on having a positive impact.

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## Research

Research is, at its core, a desire to answer a question or fulfill curiosity. It is an activity that scientists, artists, and scholars engage in to better understand the world. When I first joined the Honors Program and learned of the research competency, I became very frightened and nervous. While research still seems like a daunting task, it’s not as terrifying and ambiguous as I used to believe. It’s a rather simple idea of asking questions and finding solutions. I found that research can happen in several ways and in all sorts of places: both in labs and libraries, in one’s own home and in one’s workplace or classroom, and in all of the places in between where questions and curiosities arise.

My job as a **D2L Brightspace Support Specialist/IT Solutions Center Consultant** have allowed me to develop basic research skills of asking questions, organizing information, tapping into and contributing to knowledge bases, and basic problem solving. This is what research is all about. Research is not only applicable to scholarly projects and theses—rather it’s a way to view the world and to question that view in everyday life and activities.


I also had the opportunity to grow as a researcher in my internship at the **Soudan Underground Physics Laboratory**. This experience showed me what formal research often looks like: questioning, hypothesizing, experimenting, data collecting, synthesizing, and repeating. This internship allowed me the opportunity to help collect and organize data for an experiment that wasn’t my own, synthesize the information for tours, and consider how to design a research project.


I personally feel that I grew the most from **Anne Moody’s Mississippi: Race, Culture, and Civil Rights** class and the project my classmates and I created as well as my original research project: **African American History as Presented in Monuments and Museums in the Southern United States**, which has roots in the Mississippi class. Both offered me insight into designing an original research project, executing that design, and presenting the findings. They allowed me to explore a more creative side to research, which was something that was strange and terrifying to me when I had first started in the Honors Program.


Throughout all of my experiences, I have been able to learn and grow as a researcher. I’ve gained both day-to-day research skills and formal research skills, including organizing information, problem-solving, forming hypotheses, executing experiments, and analyzing data. I’ve learned that research isn’t about having all of the answers, rather, it’s more often about asking the right questions and sharing one’s findings with the world.


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## Global Citizenship

Being a global citizen means being aware of more than oneself. Many people want to make a difference in the world without fully realizing its size and complexity. This task of changing the world is easier dreamed than done. For me, being a global citizen envelops both the leadership and research skills that I am developing through my activities in the Honors Program. I have to want to learn about the world and the people in it, which requires research skills, and I have to be able to apply what I've learned to my life, which involves leadership abilities. Being able to listen to people without judgment, to hear their stories and opinions, to actually learn about their cultures as well as their uniqueness as individuals is a solid starting point for becoming globally competent. This is not the full extent of being a global citizen.

I've had several experiences that have allowed me to learn about my own culture as well as cultures different than my own. When I took a trip to Warsaw, Poland, I was able to learn about my heritage and my family's history. This allowed me to critically look at myself and my culture to understand my point of view of the world and how that developed. Similarly, in my Literary Studies class, I was able to critically analyze and try to understand other perspectives on important topics, issues, and themes present in current and historical events. To be a global citizen, I need to be able to objectively look at myself and my culture as well as the viewpoints of other people and other cultures.

I had a significant experience with objectively looking at multiple cultures in *Anne Moody's Mississippi* class. In this class, we examined several perspectives of Civil Rights history, including a critical examination of our own perspectives. We focused mainly on the Southern perspective, hoping to understand this perspective to have a more educated and meaningful discussion on this complex history as well as current racial issues in America. Having an understanding of one's own culture and understandings of other cultures can only go so far without effective communication. Culture is often influenced by the way we communicate, and the way we communicate is in turn influenced by culture, which I was able to explore in this class, as well as in my study of American Sign Language.

I studied American Sign Language for two years, and through my studies I was able to learn about a beautiful language and a rich culture. All of the communication in this language is technically nonverbal, and the grammar structure is dependent upon facial expressions and body language, which felt very natural to learn. Learning this language taught me so much about how language informs culture and vice versa. The two are inherently linked to each other, and how someone communicates structures how they view the world. Learning American Sign Language has taught me so much about the deaf culture and this different way to view and interact with the world.

## Experiences

Poland

Literary Studies

Anne Moody's Mississippi: Race, Culture, and Civil Rights

American Sign Language

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